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Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on the indicators on violence against women

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on the indicators on violence against women. The proposed actions to be taken by the Commission are set out in paragraph 36 of the report.

* E/CN.3/2009/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 4* (E/2008/24), chap. I.A.

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Report of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on the indicators on violence against women

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 61/143 on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, the General Assembly requested the Statistical Commission to develop and propose, in consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women, and building on the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, a set of possible indicators on violence against women in order to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women. To that end, the Friends of the Chair group was established by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session (decision 39/116). It consists of representatives of the following member States: Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Ghana, Italy, Mexico (the Chair) and Thailand, with the United Nations Statistics Division acting as secretariat of the group. In addition, the following international bodies agreed to act as observers: the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Health Organization.

II. Background

2. At its thirty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission requested the Friends of the Chair to facilitate the deliberation of this matter by reporting to the Commission at its fortieth session, proposing a list of basic indicators designed to assist national authorities in assessing the extent, prevalence and severity of violence against women.

3. The Friends of the Chair based their deliberations on the proceedings of the Expert Group Meeting on Indicators to Measure Violence against Women, held in Geneva from 8 to 10 October 2007, as well as the discussions at the joint dialogue between the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session and the Commission on the Status on Women at its fifty-second session, including the report of 25 February 2008 of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (A/HRC/7/6/Add.5).

4. The Chair and the Secretariat solicited input from all members and observers of the group, and it is incorporated in the present report.

5. The list of indicators identified by the Expert Group Meeting organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Statistics Division in October 2007 served as the starting point for discussion and for the substantive and technical contribution from participating members. That list of indicators is based primarily on two criteria, that is, on the availability of data at the national level and the seriousness of the violence

itself. The list, from the report of the Expert Group Meeting, consists of the following:

Physical violence

(a) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced physical violence during the last year*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by severity (moderate/severe); perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(b) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced physical violence during lifetime*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by severity (moderate/severe); perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

Sexual violence

(c) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced rape/sexual assault during the last year*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(d) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced rape/sexual assault during lifetime*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

Intimate partner violence

(e) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women who have ever had an intimate partner) who have experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner during the last year*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(f) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women who have ever had an intimate partner) who have* experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner during lifetime. This indicator should be disaggregated further by frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

Harmful practices[1]

Female genital mutilation/cutting

(g) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting*. This indicator should be disaggregated further by age.

[1] In the original report of the Expert Group Meeting, this subheading has the following footnote: "The proportion of women who are subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM) can be measured through population-based surveys only in countries where the number of women subjected to FGM is not too small. If the numbers are too small, sample surveys are not the proper tools and other methods should be used. Data from national censuses could also be used for the indicators on early marriage."

Early marriage

(h) *The percentage of women (over the total number of women) whose age at marriage is below 18 years.*

III. Technical evaluation

A. Criteria

6. The Friends of the Chair noted that this list of indicators and the proceedings of the Expert Group Meeting are recognized as an admirable effort and an excellent starting point for detailed discussion; the work of the group was significantly facilitated by the rich and productive outcomes and contributions of the Expert Group Meeting,[2] as well as other publications produced on this topic by the United Nations.[3]

7. The Friends of the Chair subjected these proposed indicators to a rigorous technical evaluation, taking into account national experiences in collecting, processing and disseminating statistics pertaining to violence against women, bearing in mind that most of the current national statistical systems do not routinely capture this phenomenon. The Friends of the Chair are also suggesting ways in which the compilation of the various indicators may be improved, for instance by proposing more rigorous concepts and definitions and by developing a classification by types of violence as well as the appropriate sources, either surveys or administrative records.

8. In discussing and evaluating the proposed indicators, the Friends of the Chair concluded that, in general, the basic set should meet a number of criteria, such as relevancy, establishing actions for prevention, sanction and eradication of violence against women, to satisfy needs for a political and policymaking apparatus, to ensure technical feasibility in statistical terms, comprehensibility/easiness to understand, interpret and estimate and to achieve a certain level of international comparability.

9. More specifically, the Friends of the Chair evaluated those indicators against the battery of questions regarding measurement and interpretation, relevancy and accuracy and universal applicability according to the following scheme:[4]

(a) Is it easy to measure and interpret?

(b) Is it relevant and accurate?

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[2] In addition to the *Report of the Expert Group Meeting — Indicators to measure violence against women*, the paper submitted by the Economic Commission for Europe Task Force on Measurement of Violence Against Women, *Analysis of national surveys carried out by countries of the Conference of European Statisticians to measure violence against women (ECE/CES/GE.30/2006/6)*, provided most useful input for the work of the Friends of the Chair.

[3] The publication entitled *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action, Study of the Secretary-General* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.IV.8) provided a wealth of material for discussion.

[4] These descriptions are drawn from the publication entitled *Statistics Canada Quality Guidelines*, fourth edition, issued in October 2003 and available at: www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/12-539-XIE/12-539-XIE03001.pdf.

(c) Is it universally applicable?

10. The *interpretability* of statistical information reflects the availability of supplementary information and metadata necessary to interpret and utilize it appropriately. This information normally includes the underlying concepts, variables, classifications used, the methodology of data collection and processing, and indications or measures of the accuracy of the statistical information.

11. The *relevance* of statistical information reflects the degree to which it meets the real needs of clients. It is concerned with whether the available information sheds light on the issues that are important to users. Assessing relevance is subjective and depends upon the varying needs of users. The challenge of the national statistical authorities is to weigh and balance the conflicting needs of current and potential users to produce a programme that goes as far as possible in satisfying the most important needs within given resource constraints.

12. The *accuracy* of statistical information is the degree to which the information correctly describes the phenomena it was designed to measure. It is usually characterized in terms of error in statistical estimates and is traditionally divided into bias (systematic error) and variance (random error) components. It may also be described in terms of the major sources of error that potentially cause inaccuracy (e.g. coverage, sampling, non-response, response).

13. In addition, in recommending the indicators, the Friends of the Chair primarily evaluated the feasibility of indicators from the point of view of applicability within a national statistical system, fully aware and cognizant of the deficiencies of such a system in adequately quantifying such a social phenomenon.

14. Another general assessment and starting point refers to the fact that the Friends of the Chair supported the concept of focusing on physical and sexual violence against women, as it is extremely relevant and of universal concern at the present time.

B. Concepts, definitions and classifications

15. The Friends of the Chair raised a whole set of technical questions and issues pertaining to concepts, definitions and classifications that are necessary for developing statistical instruments and internationally harmonized statistical indicators.

16. In defining physical violence, the Friends of the Chair identified it as an act that inflicts physical harm to the body of the woman. It is also acknowledged that it is advantageous and necessary to identify and enumerate different violent behaviours, rather than relying on a broad definition, especially from the point of view of designing the survey to capture violence against women. Consequently, acts such as hitting, biting, kicking, slapping, pushing, shoving, grabbing, beating, choking and assault with different objects and weapons would all fall within this category.

17. The Friends of the Chair clearly recognize the need to establish a uniform statistical classification of these acts that would fall within the concept of physical violence. Such an exhaustive classification would also need to incorporate the severity of physical violence. It is necessary to undertake further work in achieving

such a classification, given the fact that the measures of severity may be on the objective side, that is, if violence resulted in bruises, broken bones or need for medical treatment or hospitalization; on the subjective side, some victims consider slaps very serious and suffered in a situation in which they feared for their life. Also, in the case of repeated victimization, one incidence of violence resulting in serious consequences (need for medical help, for example) clearly raises the overall severity of all the victimizations.

18. Friends of the Chair define sexual violence as an act aimed to force the woman to engage in sexual acts against her will (or without her consent). Sexual violence consists of a number of different acts, such as forcing her to perform undesired sexual acts or performing any sexual activity that the female finds degrading and humiliating: attempted rape, rape and aggravated rape, being forced into sexual activity with someone else or for money or for goods.

19. As is the case with physical violence, the Friends of the Chair recommend that further work be undertaken in order to develop an internationally comparable statistical classification of sexual violence that would guide national statistical authorities in designing appropriate statistical instruments to capture violence against women. Such a classification would have to distinguish different acts of sexual violence as well as incorporate the severity in the taxonomy. It may have two main branches, distinguishing rape and attempted rape on one side and other acts on the other.

20. Friends of the Chair point to the relationship to perpetrator as a key component of the statistical measurement of violence against women. This relationship refers to an intimate partner (current, immediate former or former), a relative, acquaintance, co-worker, government authority or stranger. A special emphasis is on physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner, a person with whom a woman maintains a sexual relationship either in a formal way (marriage) or by an agreed cohabiting relationship, excluding occasional or sporadic dating.

21. As is the case with the classifications for physical and sexual violence, the Friends of the Chair note the need to develop an internationally comparable statistical classification of relationship to perpetrators and recommend that the future work focus on this need as well.

22. The Friends of the Chair recommend that the term "last year" be replaced with the usual statistical concept such as the "last twelve months". It is also necessary to further elaborate the concept of "lifetime", since it has different connotations in regard to the age of the woman.

C. Sources of statistics

23. The Friends of the Chair point to specialized surveys at the national level as the most appropriate vehicle to accurately measure the violence against women. Nevertheless, owing to resource problems, well-designed modules within a general or other purpose survey would be an appropriate tool as well. In both cases, on the condition that they comply with strict protocols of confidentiality and security for the interviewees.

24. Another source of data refers to administrative sources, primarily police, judicial and health records, as well as all services that provide attention to victims, such as "safe houses" and other shelters' records.

25. In that context, the Friends of the Chair note that, while the phenomenon of violence against women is certainly not of recent origin, a strategic and systematic approach to measuring and combating it, is. Equally important as identifying indicators at a universal level is the provision of full-fledged methodological instructions aimed at facilitating the undertaking of regular, accurate, relevant statistical measurements of violence against women within national statistical systems by using all the available sources of statistics.

26. A number of national statistical authorities undertook statistical surveys on violence against women, either as stand-alone applications or as a part of victimization or general purpose social surveys. This wealth of empirical knowledge needs to be tapped into, given the number of challenging issues that are still pertinent: the content of the survey, screening techniques, sampling, type of survey, type of interview, training of interviewers, ensuring safety to respondents, links with other social surveys, and data analysis, to name a few.

27. Consequently, the Friends of the Chair recommend that the Statistical Commission consider requesting the United Nations Statistics Division to develop, based on existing national and international experiences, a set of Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence Against Women that will provide full methodological guidance regarding the selection of core and additional topics, sources of data, relevant statistical classifications, outputs, wording of the questions and all other pertinent issues.

IV. Basic set of international indicators for measuring violence against women

28. The Friends of the Chair recommend that the following set of indicators on violence against women represent a starting point for initiating further work on identifying the most appropriate measurements:

1. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.*

2. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.*

3. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence in the last 12 months by relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.*

4. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.*

5. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months by frequency.*

6. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual or physical violence by current or former intimate partner during lifetime by frequency.*

29. The Friends of the Chair recognize the fact that the last two indicators overlap with the first four, as they are a subset of the former. However, intimate partner violence needs to be addressed independently, given its adverse impact on women and the family fabric in all societies.

30. The definition of terms is as follows:

(a) *Total rate*: Proportion of women aged 15 and over subjected to physical/sexual violence over the total number of women aged 15 and over. This rate may be presented as a fraction (e.g. 1 out of 10) or as a percentage (e.g. 10 per cent of total).

(b) *Age-specific rate*: Proportion of women of a certain age subjected to physical/sexual violence over the total number of women of the same age (5-year age groups starting at 15 years of age). This rate may be presented as a fraction (e.g. 1 out of 10) or as a percentage (e.g. 10 per cent of total).

(c) *Total and specific rates for intimate partner violence*: Proportion of women aged 15 and over subjected to physical or sexual violence by current or former partner over the total number of women aged 15 and over who have or had an intimate partner.

31. The Friends of the Chair recommend that two indicators require further assessment and may become part of the recommended set pending the outcome of the deliberations: early marriage and female genital mutilation.

32. As for the phenomenon of early marriage as a proxy for assessing violence against women, the Friends of the Chair noted that that was one of the phenomena that required a much heavier focus at the international level. Recognizing that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, in its General Recommendation 21,[5] paragraphs 36-39, clearly singled out early marriage for its potential to generate adverse consequences on the status of women, the Friends of the Chair urge the Statistical Commission and other relevant United Nations bodies to further the work on reaching an international agreement regarding the definition of early marriage in the context of violence against women. The Friends of the Chair therefore recommend further evaluation of this phenomenon and its possible inclusion in the recommended set.

33. Female genital mutilation causes extreme harm to women; although not practised universally, it requires universal attention in view of its severity. The Friends of the Chair therefore recommend further evaluation of this phenomenon and its possible inclusion in the recommended set.

34. Given the seriousness of violence against women brought to its ultimate consequence, as is the case with femicide in general, and spousal homicide in particular, recognizing the importance of the necessity for approximate assessment of the scope of these phenomena at the national and international levels, and in

[5] See the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on its thirteenth session, in 1994 (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/49/38), chap. I.A).

order for the countries to undertake adequate measures, the Friends of the Chair, in accordance to the proposal of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, suggest that special attention be paid to the possibility of introducing a specific indicator to be added to the proposed set: "Annual rate of femicides". This indicator refers to the total female homicides in a year, broken down by perpetrator, relationship to sexual abuse and whether the victim was a sex trade worker. This indicator can be derived only from the information from criminal or health registers. It is thus fundamental that the countries initiate a revision of national instruments for registering these events in order to capture the characteristics mentioned above, i.e., the perpetrator, involvement of sexual abuse and occupation of the victim.[6]

35. In addition, the Friends of the Chair identified a number of other manifestations of violence against women that have to be subjected to further evaluation and need to be assessed as possible topics for subnational, national, regional and international measurement, such as psychological and economic violence, stalking, physical and sexual violence in childhood, forced marriage, discrimination and economic violence at work, trafficking in women, impact of incidence of sexual violence against women on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, assessing risk factors, assessing the extent to which women recognize the suffered violence as a crime, and the percentage of hidden violence unreported to the authorities, or, indeed, even within the community. The Friends of the Chair recommend that the work defining these and other indicators remain at the forefront of the activities of the Statistical Commission for the next five years, until the full spectrum of international indicators on violence against women is achieved.

V. Proposed actions by the Statistical Commission

36. The Statistical Commission may decide to:

(a) **Welcome and recognize the present report as an initial step in developing statistical indicators for measuring violence against women;**

(b) **Adopt the proposed statistical indicators for measuring violence against women as presented in paragraph 28 of this report as an interim set pending further elaboration;**

(c) **Request the Friends of the Chair to continue the work on developing the indicators in line with the recommendations in this report and to report regularly to the Statistical Commission;**

(d) **Request the United Nations Statistics Division to initiate and conduct work on developing a set of Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence Against Women that will provide full methodological guidance regarding the selection of core and additional topics, sources of data, relevant statistical classifications, outputs, wording of the questions and all other pertinent issues.**

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[6] As per "Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural, including the right to development, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk, Indicators on violence against women and State response" (A/HRC/7/6 of 29 January 2008), submitted to the Human Rights Council at its seventh session.